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Still Out of Control

President Carter has ended secret payments by the Central Intelligence Agency to King Hussein of Jordan and, given the circumstances, that was the right thing to do.

A critical element in those circumstances is that no one in the old administration and no one on the CIA staff had mentioned the multimillion-dollar program to the new President until last week. Carter was suddenly confronted with new evidence that the intelligence organization is still out of control.

The record is not clear as to how much other Presidents knew of this operation, and what oversight they may have effected. Bob Woodward, in his article in the Washington Post exposing the operation, reports that it began under President Eisenhower and continued under Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Ford. The Intelligence Oversight Board called it to the attention of Ford last year. We do not know if he had been informed previously.

Members of the oversight board concluded that the payments were an impropriety. Members of that committee know a good deal more than we about what is going on in intelligence operations. They are well aware of the necessity, however distasteful, to bribe, to buy information, to do dirty tricks in the deadly competition loose in the world today. Their conclusion must be read in that context.

If we feel a hesitancy to pass judgment on this particular clandestine operation, we have no hesitancy in noting that resorting to the sordid side of international relations usually results in doing more harm than good. The exposure of this arrangement, however the king may explain it, will do damage that almost certainly will overwhelm whatever good was achieved.

There is evidence that the United States gained a good deal. To the extent that these personal payments encouraged or fortified the king's moderation, regional security was well served. To the extent that it bought hospitality for American intelligence operations, American, NATO and Israeli security was enhanced.

We do not know how Hussein used the money. The grants were substantial, no question of that. Even after they were cut last year, the total was more than $750,000 a year, according to Woodward's account.

Some of the money reportedly went for protection of the royal family, and that was understandable. Some went for the purchase of intelligence from other nations and other agencies, and that was not a departure from normal practices in spying. But a good deal apparently went to support the king's taste for lavish living, and that is not an expenditure likely to delight American taxpayers.

Intelligence agents insist that the king remained his own man, not a puppet. Certainly the personal grants were dwarfed by the aid of record, $200 million in loans and grants last year. But we are left with a deep anxiety about the integrity and reliability of a ruler who would enter an arrangement such as this.

What matters most now, however, is not agonizing over what was done, but making sure that there is control in the future. This exposure illuminates above all the dimension of the task ahead for the man Carter has chosen to head the CIA, Adm. Stansfield Turner.

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